

Working in the Time of COVID-19 Oral History Project
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Joel Shapira
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Member, Twin Cities Musicians Union, 30-73

Interviewee: Joel Shapira

Interviewers: Murphy Janssen

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JOEL SHAPIRA 00:00:00: Really, really, encouraging, you know?

MURPHY JANSSEN 00:00:03: I love that.

JOEL 00:00:05: Yeah, people stepped up. I mean, it was touching.

MURPHY 00:00:09: That's so great. Yeah, I mean, I hope people take this time and— I'm wondering what your take is on it—not having had live music for now three months, give or take.

JOEL 00:00:32: So this is this part of your questions then?

MURPHY 00:00:35: Yeah, I mean, it's a conversation.

JOEL 00:00:39: So yeah, just feel free to ask me questions, whatever you need.

MURPHY 00:00:41: Yeah. The goal of the project really is to get—it's called an oral history project. And so I'm—I reached out to you, a friend of a player named Taylor Donskey, who's in the [Twin] cities—is my age. I think he teaches at Twin Town [Guitars].

JOEL 00:01:01: Yeah, I've heard the name.

MURPHY 00:01:03: Yeah. And then guys like Chris Bowlby, who I studied with at St. Thomas. Oh, and Chris Keishon. You know him. And just trying to get a kind of wider variety of takes on the matter from young people in academia to people programming.

JOEL 00:01:23: Yeah, that's a good lineup of different aspects, I think. Yeah, alright. So, just initially, to kind of answer your question a little bit—you know, my gig calendar—I mean, starting my last public performance, jazz gig, was March 11 at Hell's Kitchen. Phil was on it, actually.

MURPHY 00:01:49: Oh, cool.

JOEL 00:01:50: Yeah, it was a great gig. God, it was so much fun to play. But—that was right before—it was really heating up then. It was like, There's this terrible virus da-da-da-da-da, What's going to happen with the venues? Etc, etc. And the decisions had not really been made at that point, but I remember the following week, I had probably seven gigs or something, which is—since you're doing this interview about it, that was reasonably common. I'd have a minimum of five—anywhere from five to eight a week. I went from 100 miles an hour to zero, basically overnight. So, as soon as everyone made the decision, that it's no longer safe to be in the venues—and then shortly following that, the venues closed to try to cut their losses as best they can. And so people were really freaked out by the whole thing. So that's what happened with that. Then that went away. I mean— All my gigs, my regular gigs, the airport, The Lexington, Midtown Global Market, the place I play at in White Bear [Lake], Ingredients Cafe, Hell's Kitchen. Just everything—the Dakota [Jazz Club]. So, in all honesty, I'm fortunate because at my age, I was lucky enough to be immersed in super busy periods and, I don't know if lucrative is the right word in the music business—I see lucrative as being relative, you know what I mean? For being a career jazz musician, I feel like I did well enough that I could set myself up for a slow time. Thank God. I got turned—I got rejected for all the unemployment, everything. I got one week of it and then I got turned away for everything else because I still have my online students. I was making just enough money that I was disqualified for everything. So, by canceling my students, I would have made like four times the money. *(laughs)* You know what I mean? But I don't want to.

MURPHY 00:04:15: *(groans)* That's such a hard place to be in and I think it's really representative of the system at play—is that if you're trying to work, especially teach, which is a service in itself—not talking about performing as a service and that whole aspect of performing artists, but that's sometimes a gray area with people not understanding what the arts give to a public, but education and teaching is a lot more black and white and we could say, This is a public good and teach—educate students. So you're

going. Well, if I want to be a contributing member and teach, then I'm not going to make money, but if I cancel and not do, kind of, my moral good and [keep these] students, then I can make money. It's—

JOEL 00:05:25: Isn't that something? Yeah, that's a—really well put. That's a great point. It is more clear cut, obviously. It's a service and people are studying with you like you're a teacher, just like you go to college, although I'm not accredited or anything, but I'm jazz school or whatever, like most guys. The thing is—for one thing, the unemployment money, if I understand correctly, runs out at the end of July anyway. So, it's short term, but the fact that they set it up— I told everybody going into it including my wife, who is really knowledgeable about all this stuff— I said, I won't get anything, you watch. There's always a way that a musician is going to get screwed out of whatever. Sure enough, I got to the two yard line with all this crap, including like long, long—waiting on the phone on hold for three hours. Then, when it all came down to it, No, you're making \$34 a week too much. And that was it. But I told Karen [inaudible?] I'd rather— That's one thing that's actually been a shining light of all this sad period is still having that, and all my students from Cadenza [Music]. Everybody I taught there, they all came with me online.

MURPHY 00:07:03: Wow. Yeah. Awesome. How was that switch? Had you done any online teaching previously?

JOEL 00:07:11: Never. And it was hard the first few weeks. I'm just—be honest and blunt about it. It really sucked because of the tech aspect. I'm not a computer guy. I'm not young enough to have grown up with it. Everything I learned from a tech standpoint is retroactive. So, right now, the system you see, the headphones, and everything I'm doing, I'm running through my interface. I didn't know what an interface was until— Yeah, long story short, I did all this stuff. I ordered the interface online. I researched it, made the best decision I possibly could with all this stuff. And then, of course, the way things are, you order from Amazon or wherever, it's there the next day, and I needed it. But, actually, I gave a few lessons for a couple weeks without it, and the whole thing was just, like, all the lessons were more about the technical problems than actual lessons. And I was thinking, This isn't gonna work. This is ridiculous. Yeah, but I got this hooked up, and so, now, if you can hear and see me clearly and all that, that's what the end result was. So, now I can give decent lessons. You can't really play together. There's the lag, which you've probably read about. You know, no matter how strong the connection is, there's always enough of a lag that that you can't play together.

MURPHY 00:08:44: Yeah, that's something that I've thought about not only with private teaching, but as I've talked to people like Chris or [inaudible]_____ and some adjunct professors and maybe even— I don't know if you've talked to Pete about it because I know he was at Macalester [College] and I can imagine he was adjunct. But—

JOEL 00:09:07: He's still been there. I mean—they're figuring out their whole deal.

MURPHY 00:09:12: But—you were at cadenza, and I would assume you were an independent contractor.

JOEL 00:09:24: Yeah, exactly.

MURPHY 00:09:26: What did they do, or what have you heard, if you talk to Pete about it—what was it— if I can formulate my question a little more—the responsibility of the educator to essentially acquire a new skill of IT and tech— What has that been like, of placing the burden on the educator to acquire a new skill in order to maintain a lifestyle versus an organization providing help and a framework? You can continue working through Cadenza or through the university and a lot of stuff I’ve read about adding more on the plate of educators, so that—

JOEL 00:10:24: That's a great question. Yeah. So, it's like what I was saying— Basically, it all falls on you. For one thing, because everybody was in—it's chaos. And, I'm good friends with Dan, who owns Cadenza and, of course, he obviously has his work cut out for him. So, there's instructors at the store, just like everywhere else—the younger instructors that are more in on the computer thing, it was obviously easier for them. There's a lot of instructors, say, like my age or whatever. There's plenty of them that're older than I am. They just couldn't do it. They just bowed out. They said, “No, I'll just have to come back when lessons start up again.”

So, in that case, you—it's like I was saying earlier, you just hope that they're kind of set up, but yeah, I did get it going, and now, I learned a lot. I have to be honest, like, just what I learned by being actually forced to do it myself. I mean, trial and error, and really frustrating. It's like anything—I learned more about these operating systems and everything than I had ever known by 10 times more. So, in that respect, it's helpful. It's not like I would want to really do it all the time. I want to go back to in-person lessons as soon as possible because it's better for everybody. It's better for the student. It's just more enjoyable, and the learning situation is much better, in my opinion. But you but you've had to adapt your lesson format and what you actually work on, and how you teach, how you approach it with online lessons. More of it falls on the student because you can't play together and I can give people examples, but it's more like I tell the student, Okay, try to have this prepared, we'll go over this, and they understand that they'll have to sit and play things for me by themselves more than they used to in one-on-one lessons.

MURPHY 00:12:44: In kind of a silver lining attitude, that might push—it depends on probably the students that you're teaching, but if they're looking like that— I'm thinking of somebody like Ryan, we'll take him—he's performing regularly anyway, does this kind of lesson format allow you to maybe give the student an idea of what a performance feels like? I'm sure they do—

JOEL 00:13:20: Yeah, no, that's actually a great question, too. You're a player, man, you know what you're talking about. So, imagine you're holding your guitar and I'm like, Okay, play something.

(*Murphy laughs*) You know, I don't try to do that, but they're there. They're under the magnifying glass more than ever. Ryan is a perfect example of somebody that's totally young enough that he wasn't fazed by it much at all. He knew what he was doing. I mean, to him, it's just more online stuff and so he—I taught him yesterday, and I just know that you feel more like you're just—it is a performance. I mean, you're point-blank right there. Not that the lessons are like that; it's still just a lesson, but I have to remind some of these guys, the ones who tend to get more wound up about all that, I'm just like, Look, man, number one, we're here to work on your music. We're not looking for right or wrong or anything else, but they would get rattled. I've been doing my—the one gig I do have regularly—they've moved my church thing online. So I've had that every Sunday. But, as you know, along those same lines, this is new to me, too. So, if I'm in a Zoom room like this with twenty five people, and I'm playing by myself, it's way more focused than when I'm playing live at church when there's a bunch of distractions and whatever else. So I realized that like the first week in. It's like, Oh, well, if you want to sound—just because of who I am—I go in there with the idea that I want to do this note perfect. I'm not saying that happens all the time, but that's just my nature of preparing. So, I played Bach or something, and it was like, Oh, you better you better practice this because people know this music and it's gonna be really dead silent and focused. So, in that respect, it kept me honest.

MURPHY 00:15:34: Yeah, that's kind of an interesting silver lining, I'll say it again, to— A lot of this is turning inward a little bit and really taking a hard look at the performance you can give, and the music that you want to make or you can make and really clarifying that for yourself, which is—

JOEL 00:16:07: Right. Well, I'm sure—undoubtedly, you've seen all the Zoom performances and all these different things going on. So, some of these people, from the Twin Cities, I know you'll know—say like Krissy Bergmark, the tabla player. She's cool, man. She's a good musician, she's a real positive person, I think. But that was the first Zoom concert performance I watched, a month ago or whatever. And so they had her, I don't remember the other two only because—no, one was Liz Draper, bass player, who I've worked with. Liz is great. And the third one I didn't know personally, but they set it up in a format where they would each play a piece. So, Liz does her thing for five or ten minutes, and they would trade off. So what it was like [was] kind of a round robin of a Zoom performance and people would be going in and out and stay for a while, come back. You're free to come and go as you want, and then, of course, they flash their Venmo and PayPal, and they're there. They're modest about it because they know, half—most of the people watching are musicians, right? If you're in a position to contribute a little, that would be great. If you're not, that's fine. We understand. But, just because, in my opinion, it's the right thing to do, I give them something. But that's the new, at least temporary, performing realm.

MURPHY 00:17:51: In an interesting way, it almost seems more accessible. I mean, it is in that you just have to have an internet connection, and you're able to maybe play some music that you wouldn't be able to perform at a venue. And you don't have to worry about filling seats because people can log in and log off. And you don't have to please a restaurateur or a club owner with the type of music you're playing. So it's almost—it's somewhat freeing, while at the same time coming about because of a weird—

JOEL 00:18:34: Yeah, isn't that odd? That's a great point. You know, that's exactly right, and, in that respect, that's a whole new dimension of musical performance. And I think people are sort of just getting going on this. I'm convinced that—hopefully, we all pray that things come back to whatever the new normal is going to be, but the venues survive and we can play like we used to.

MURPHY 00:19:03: In that regard, what do you see— This is a broad question, but like, Is there a return to normal, or is it forever changed? Is there a new normal, and what does that—? What do you think the new normal looks like?

JOEL 00:19:28: Well, that's a good question. You know, it would have been, in my opinion, easier to answer that question two weeks ago, before the massive civil unrest. Then, we were just dealing with a pandemic, and just all those ramifications. Now, you know, the stakes and everything, it's just changed so drastically in such a short period of time. So, the social thing obviously factors into it. I mean, you know, all these areas, Lake street and all that, and that area by The Hook and Ladder—Minnehaha. It seems to me from what I've seen— I haven't actually been to that specific area because you can't really get there. You'd have to walk and blah blah blah. Hook and Ladder survived, whereas a lot of them didn't because that third precinct—that police station—right next to it, right? They burned that one down to the ground, if I can understand it correctly. So, a beautiful old venue. I'm sure you've been in or worked at The Hook and Ladder.

MURPHY 00:20:37: Yeah, yeah, I've played there multiple times.

JOEL 00:20:39: Yeah, the thing—the place is like from 1900. You know, it's not replaceable. You could rebuild a new structure, but those—

MURPHY 00:20:47: Oh, that's the third precinct.

JOEL 00:20:49: Yeah, the third precinct was right next to it. Yeah, and it's still, somehow or another, they managed to make it, it looks like. So, the first thing is: did these venues survive? I mean physically. Some of them did. So, the Hexagon [Bar], you know that place, right? Pete and I actually took a long drive around both St. Paul and Minneapolis last week and checked out everything. We drove by the Hexagon, whatever that's on. It's over by twenty seventh. It was still smoldering. It was that recent. So, we drove by it and it just stinks. Fires like that don't just go out. It's like it was smoldering, and I— Granted, I never worked there, because it was like a rock club or whatever.

MURPHY 00:21:44: Yeah, I played there a bunch— (*laughs*)

JOEL 00:21:46: Yeah, so you know about it. The place is gutted. I mean, it's gone. So, if you're, if you're an owner of a place like that, the first thing that I'm thinking is I really hope you had your

insurance intact. Number two, they would have to have the motivation to want to rebuild after that. I mean, I can't even imagine. It's demoralizing so much just to even see it, but imagine that's your life and your livelihood and everything. How do you just start over, anyway? You know, right. So to relate it to your question— (*laughs*) The new normal, in my opinion, just like jazz—and you'll know about this—was a social protest music. The advent of it, you know what I mean? A Black social protest music. That's the truth. That element needs to be, and will be, at the forefront of a lot of music now, and I think it should be. I think the two are going to be more intertwined than ever, and I think that's fantastic.

MURPHY 00:22:56: That's awesome, and can lead me into another area and why I wanted to get you on a call, specifically, for your jazz knowledge and passion for the music of jazz. Some things that I've read about recently dealt with the kind of—reenergizing maybe is the wrong word, but a reinjection of jazz culture in the early 90s. Guys like Wynton [Marsalis]—

JOEL 00:23:39: Actually, Wynton would have been like the early 80s.

MURPHY 00:23:43: Early 80s, and then into the 90s, this group called The Young Lions who [were] bringing jazz back into the mainstream, and mainstream meaning—using it as kind of business language almost. A lot of great things were started, but I'm also wondering, from your point of view— Like you just said, jazz was originally, essentially a protest music, and how you've seen, as a jazz musician—how you've seen the language of jazz change, be co-opted, and what that's meant to you, and where you think maybe jazz can be— Like you just said, [we're already] associating it with the protests.

JOEL 00:24:39: Those are fantastic questions. Those are huge questions. It's hard to give you just a brief answer.

MURPHY 00:24:47: It doesn't have to be brief.

JOEL 00:24:49: Well, there's the most relevant questions you could ask. So, I can only speak, from my own experience. Part of— I would say is like, number one, man—and you know this from being a player— Have you ever had a more communal, religious type experience with other human beings than playing music with him? Playing jazz? I mean there's your relationships, your spouses, whatever, which is also, obviously, a huge thing and a wonderful thing. And it's different. But one thing to say about a jazz performance—you don't even have to have ever met these people in your life. If you get experienced players—guys that can play—you don't even have to talk to them. Counting the tune— It can be magic. That element about playing jazz— I think that that element is multifaceted. Number one, I remember early on when I made the conscious decision, I'm going to be a jazz musician for my life. It just had to be, and I can't explain it more than it's just who I am, and I—in a way, I was lucky enough to realize that early on because that way I didn't have to make a decision about What am I gonna do? But the flip side to it was—you're entering a life of certain financial misery. (*Murphy laughs*) And a lot of my friends, including guys that weren't musicians at all, and—not even that, they were kind of

financially well off. They would tell me that, You're headed for a life of blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and I was kind of like—I couldn't disagree. So, what I'm getting at is the glorious aspect of playing jazz and improvisational music was more important and more satisfying and outweighed any rotten financial consequences. Does that make sense? Yeah, so I didn't care. I knew no matter what I did, whatever day job, whatever the hell I had to do to have a roof over my head—it would probably work out. I always expected it. I'll tell my wife this, still—I said, I always expected to be poor; poor is you can pay your bills and eat okay. I guess poor people can't even do that. So, what I mean my expectations were always just to be able to survive. So, playing that music, jazz in particular—the glorious sides of it and everything—the soul side of it outweighs everything. And I think anybody who's ever been serious about this music and doing it with their life realizes that because they know the downsides. So that's a big part of it. Going forward, if this is part of your last question— The new normal, or whatever people keep saying—I mean, I want that experience back where I can hang out with my buddies, and play the music we love and then, on top of it, of course, we got paid for it. I was at the absolute pinnacle of my career when this happened, and so— Sometimes, if I'm in a bad mood or whatever, I'm like da-da-da-da, — but, you know, I'm old enough to realize—I'm grateful for what I've been able to do. I've had more success than I could have dreamed of. If it ended now for whatever reason, I don't feel like I would be—I mean, I would be devastated because I could not play anymore, but I don't feel like I could complain about my career, if that makes sense. I got to play with heroes of mine, like Eric [? Revit ?]. I got to play with heroes, all the guys I worshipped when I was a kid, when I was like, How am I gonna play this? How am I gonna do this? How am I gonna get paid for it? You know, Phil? You know, Phil's in my band. Phil's a buddy, too. Phil and I have a good rapport. Does that make sense?

MURPHY 00:29:59: Yeah, it does. It does. One thing that I've been thinking about as—I feel lucky to be in school right now during this and not being dependent on performance opportunities. So, one thing that I'm thinking about with having a career in performance-based work and, obviously, if you can— Something that I've always thought is, If I can make enough to live on performing or doing music, then I will be grateful for that. But, sometimes, I think that leads to an obvious exploitation of the performances given because we, as musicians, are so into—for lack of a better word, jazzed—to be able to make money off playing, that we're not always compensated or taken care of for the labor that we do, with practice, in providing this high art form. So, I'm wondering if you've ever worked with a union or— Especially today, we're looking at a lot of things called mutual aid, community networks that are providing resources and funding for artists and the arts, and I'm wondering if you've ever taken part in labor that's—

JOEL 00:31:53: That's a great question. Alright. So I should say up front, Springboard for the Arts—I don't know if you've heard about them? You know, they stepped up, man. Their design— They had grants offered specifically for career musicians, performers, which I am. Yeah, I applied. I wrote it off. I didn't hear from them for like six weeks, I forgot about it. But they gave me a grant and a bunch of guys in my whole circle—professional jazz guys. So, whoever their benefactors are—

MURPHY 00:32:26: I think it's public right now.

JOEL 00:32:28: Yeah, I think so too. It is. Yeah, it's super cool. And, I mean, it really helped. And not only that, it's—those are the kinds of things that give me faith in people's—that they actually care about what we do. Because we don't feel that way all that much at the time. I mean, that varies, but something like that is— They called me. I missed the email saying I won it, probably because it went to my junk mail—somebody I don't know. Ten days after the fact, the guy actually called me, it was like, “Did you know—?”

And I was like, No. So, I couldn't believe it. They stepped up. One of their buildings got damaged, too, I found out recently—on University, I'm pretty sure. Yeah, it got looted, broken windows and everything. That just shows you how screwed up everything is. Yeah, but to answer your other— I am in the [Twin Cities] Musicians Union, 30-73. You know, they're good people. Do you know who Dave Graf is? Trombone player?

MURPHY 00:33:48: I've heard the name.

JOEL 00:33:50: You know, he's [the] generation older than me. Great player, man. Great musician. And, you know, he knows the business. He's been a professional jazz player for fifty years, probably. So he knows the business. So, he's the guy now. Him and Doug Haining, another guy that I've worked with— They're secretary and vice president or something. So you see their names and their ideas on a lot of the union stuff that is going out right now, in regards to rebuilding and what happens next for musicians and all that, and I really, really like that because they're both heavyweight jazz players. They get it from our perspective. It could be an orchestra player or something, which would be fine, and I understand all that, but these guys live in the same realm as I do. It makes it easy for me to follow. So I value that a lot. So, the community thing— I believe in community, wholeheartedly. It's everything. The Jazz community is a perfect example. You know what the J[S Bean Factory]— After a while, when I started really becoming a regular for the coffee shop, what it reminded me of? It reminded me of *The Simpsons*, where there's all these different characters. It's like completely different people from different walks of life, everything, just popping in and out and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. You know, and this is where you are the catalyst to The Nooners. People ask me this question because Pete and I— What were we interviewed for? People ask us about this for the radio and whatever. Like, How did The Nooners come about? And I explain to them the story, it's like, Well, Pete and I had played jazz gigs, when Pete plays drums, and he would say, Yeah, I played banjo. Then I probably said to him something like—because I have acoustic guitars, it was— We both knew you at that point [? well enough to say ?], “You know what we should do? We should ask Murphy if we can go up and play on the patio sometime.” That's how The Nooners started. And that was about two years ago, the end of May. I don't know if you happen to see this— We did the first gig back, The Nooners two year anniversary celebration.

So, when people ask me that question, that's what happened. And it was no more complicated than, Hey, Pete, let's just go ahead and Murphy if we can play on the patio today. Two years later, we actually became kind of ingrained in that community. We played there all winter, indoors this time, and more and more and more and more people— You could tell people were there to hear us. So I felt it— Without trying to sound too syrupy or corny, it's really touching to me. Not only because you and I became pals, but think—all the people—Michelle, Lindsay, Dakota—these are all people that I feel I'm actually—they're important people to me, and they're friends of mine now. Even if the gig doesn't happen, or who knows what, just the fact that we had that experience and that the community that's there is huge to me. So, that's one really good example of it. Then another one would be— Because Sharman and I have performed at Midtown Global Market. I'm assuming you've been over there—we've played there, basically, since they opened. So, it's got to be close to 15 years now, like once a month. I don't know if you know who Baba is. He's the heart and soul and face of the entire market. As he's been there, he's moved up in the ranks. So, now, I always used to tell them, You know, Baba, you should run for mayor of Minneapolis. And the thing is, I'm only half joking, like super popular, right? And he's a great guy. But this is another thing where— Because of the nature of the market and all that, we've made friends, we have followers and listeners, we've made friends with so many people there. I'd become close friends with Baba in a way. When my mother passed away, Baba turned up at the service. Things like this, you know? That meant the world to me. So, when you combine that community aspect with being able to play the music you love and get paid for it? It's my dream. So, it kind of goes back to what I've said. I always—I think I was honest enough with myself to really feel grateful for this while it was happening. I'm a guy that never took my career for granted because I know how harsh the music business can be. I've seen so many people destroyed by it, whether it's booze or who knows what, but just—it can be so hard. So, since I was lucky enough to be working all the time, I was just thankful for it every day. And just like tomorrow, I think Pete and I will probably have a double header: JS, then down to The Black Dog [Café]. And we're not gonna make a lot of money, but, especially now, just to be able to do it, it's everything to us.

MURPHY 00:39:43: Does The Black Dog—are they doing a live streaming thing, or is it—?

JOEL 00:39:50: Just us. Just The Nooners, just because I— Here's something else that you probably aren't aware of, which is neither here nor there, although you might find it interesting, from a barista standpoint. That same day, March 11, that I had my last gig, I had a doctor's appointment that morning. I was diagnosed with diabetes type two, but the upshot of it is, I had to completely change my diet and everything and that included having two or three giant vanilla lattes every morning. (*Murphy laughs*) Right? So, now, the reason why I mentioned this in The Black Dog is, I told Sarah. I was like, Here's what happened, and I got this medical thing. Can you make me a latte? No sugar, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. She was like, “Yeah, we have almond milk—”

So, long story short, I would order these curbside pickup lattes because I couldn't—I didn't want to go without it. So, I drive down and then, one time, I drive down and pick one up and I was like, “Sarah,

what if I want to come in and do a streaming show sometime?” And she was like, “Yeah, for sure.” And I was like, “Well, I’m gonna ask Pete, you know, and The Nooners.” And then so we started doing it.

MURPHY 00:41:08: Well, and it’s such a mutually beneficial thing, not only for The Nooners, but for The Black Dog, too, in just— This is something that I definitely want to ask my friend Taylor, who is my age, kind of coming up in an industry. I think you’ll have a different take, but in a kind of an industry that thrives on competition, especially in today’s— I’m wondering what your thought is with what we’ve seen in the last couple months, the doubling down on community and people recognizing the competitive sphere that they were forced into before, you know, not worth it. What’s your take, or have you—were you, did you feel squeezed in a competitive way ever?

JOEL 00:42:15: Oh, yeah. Every working musician is. Yeah, I mean, it’s either you’re younger and you’re coming up and you’re scrapping for every gig you can get and get your name out there. Or you’re getting older and you’re dealing with everybody coming up that has more time and energy and inclination to hustle every gig possible. Yeah, and I’ve seen it from both sides, so I’ve thought of this, too. I was thinking to myself, I wonder if when things go back and people are playing again, if it’s gonna be a little bit more of a kind of, “I love you, bro,” more communal, less “I want the gig” competitive thing. That remains to be seen because I think the competitiveness—it certainly has its aggravating and nerve-racking elements. The one thing I will say about it, right off the bat, that’s positive—it makes you keep your playing sharp. It has to. Guys like—remember I was playing in Viex Carré all the time, solo guitar? I’d open up for these guys, these New York players, man—just me playing guitar, and those New York guys— Not only do I want to sound halfway decent for them, because they’d be talking about—they’d be out there

MURPHY 00:43:42: (*laughs*) Talking about, “Show me what you got, yeah.”

JOEL 00:43:44: Big time. They were cool and all that, but you knew what was happening.

MURPHY 00:43:51: “Play something for me.” (*laughs*)

JOEL 00:43:52: Right, that’s exactly it. But, you know, those New York guys, man. They bring an urgency to the music, unlike anything else. It has to do with what you’re talking about. It has to do with that competitiveness. Because if you think jazz is competitive here, go there. You’re competing with some of the greatest players in the world for a \$40 gig, and these guys—their playing—it’s just on fire. So I would try to use that as inspiration and focus on just the musical aspect of having my shit together as much as possible.

MURPHY 00:44:31: Yeah. Do you think that competitive nature is— My question is, Do you think that competitive nature needs to be pushed on the industry from outside forces or if it’s inherent in jazz itself

and that's good enough? Like, could we have a system that supports everybody, but the music itself will create that urgency or do you think it's—

JOEL 00:45:12: Super great question, man. Yeah, these are like grad-level college questions. (*Murphy laughs*) That's a really good question. You know, it's hard to say because, like I said human nature—people are competitive by nature. I think part of it—the survival instinct—if this is gonna be your primary way of putting food on your table, it's impossible [to] not be competitive. So I think that's gonna be there. If you're lucky enough— If you're an artist who doesn't have to worry that much about the financial aspect of the business, and there are people like that, born into money, whatever has happened—you can focus strictly on the music and not have to worry about doing whatever gigs you don't want to do, and the tedious, tedious side of calling a venue 30 times for a gig. So, in that respect, I think, if you're an insightful enough, creative enough, driven enough artist and musician, just on those merits alone, you can create something really significant without really being immersed in the competitive business side. Does that make sense? Yeah, but it's rare. My favorite jazz trio of all time I would have to say is the Keith Jarrett Trio. You know, DeJohnette, Gary Peacock—Peacock's now 85 or 86. They won't perform together again. I think that day has come and gone. But the last time that trio was in Minneapolis—and this was a long time ago now, probably close to twenty years—they flew in and out on a jet. But those guys are the top, the top of the top, ever, in this industry. People say Jamal Jarrett's a multimillionaire and, not only do I doubt that, but I also think he deserves it. I think he deserves it and the fact that he's one of the greatest artists of the last century, without a doubt. So it's good to see somebody get recognized for their musical merits and reap actually the financial reward whereas, in the jazz world, that's not always the case at all. It's really rare. So when people are saying, Yeah, man, Jarrett flies around on a jet. I don't think he owns it, but he would—you buy tickets, fly in and out, and they would just fly in and do the gig and then fly back to his hotel in Chicago or something. You don't associate that with jazz. But what I was getting at, I guess, is that musicians of that caliber, they're fully able to create. I mean, that's their whole life. They don't have to worry about selling seats. They don't have to worry about brown nosing club owners, any of the bullshit with the business. They show up and play. That's a huge luxury. I will never reach that. I've also come to terms with that, too, and that's okay. But I make no pretenses that— That world doesn't exist anymore in my opinion. You have to be from generations past to be that established. Does that answer your question?

MURPHY 00:49:11: Totally. Yeah. It's these things that I'm thinking about, asking people—they're hard. I found it hard to think about because so many things are so intertwined, so normalized, so a part of everyday life, and I think we're finding that—with these, you know, revolution rebellion talk with the MPD [Minneapolis Police Department] is the police force is so normalized in our culture that when groups like MPD 150, Reclaim the Block, these organizations that are talking about community action removing the police—it seems so far-fetched and people can't get their brain around it, but I think it's important to talk about, question if the— Was the normal that was in March, does that need to be the normal in July?

JOEL 00:50:24: Well, it's already loosened up. In Minnesota, this week, Monday, June 1, restaurants are able to open the patios and the outdoor seating. I think—it's hard to keep track of the developments, but they'll work on opening indoor seating with social distancing next. It's a progression. But, to what you're saying—the community thing, eliminate the police force. It's unrealistic. Not only that, it'll never happen and it's—my idea, it's not a good idea. It's not gonna work. You need something, in my opinion. What it goes back to is just community. What you need— Good cops, in my opinion, they're supposed to be pillars of the community. They're supposed to be involved in the community and the voice of the community, not people that come in and stomp the residents' heads. That has to go, and you're seeing that displayed in full force. If you had people that—law-abiding policemen that looked out for the community's interests and were honest—I mean, honest enough that at least you could trust them and not fear them, wouldn't that be something?

MURPHY 00:51:54: Yeah, and in a less grave or fatal sense, I think we can kind of equate that with clubs the Dakota [Jazz Club] that we see as a pillar, in Minneapolis, of the jazz medium.

JOEL 00:52:21: Yeah. Although they do a lot more than jazz now. I'll tell you something about the Dakota, real quick. You know, Lowell, the owner—he really stepped up for Sharman and I. We have a new CD. Long story short, he organized this streaming thing for the club, paid us nicely for the gig. I don't know if you haven't seen any of that.

MURPHY 00:52:44: I haven't seen the performance, but I knew that it was happening.

JOEL 00:52:49: Yeah, so you saw me plugging it, or whatever. That was their doing. They—he called me, you know, and it was just like that. That blew me away.

MURPHY 00:53:00: It's necessary, you know? That's really special, and I feel like, the more that happens, the better off we are. Instead of you trying to set up a live stream, right? Like we, you— Us, as individual artists, gig laborers, need these kinds of pillars to also be looking out for everybody—offering their platform.

JOEL 00:53:30: Yeah, that's the truth. What knocked me out about it— He's like, “You know, you guys have contributed a lot to the jazz community over the years,” and just all the things that you would like to hear from a club owner of that magnitude, but never ever do just because the opportunity's not really there. I don't expect them to be fawning all over me, but the fact that he even acknowledged me when you could pick us from a sea of great musicians—it really means a lot. Like I was saying, with the JS thing, the communal thing, and the fact that you're recognized. I don't ask for a lot. He paid us nicely for the gig. We went and did a gig in Sharman's backyard, and the Dakota did all the sound, took care of everything, and streamed it. It was frickin' great, man.

MURPHY 00:54:18: That's super cool. I didn't know they did a mobile rig.

JOEL 00:54:30: A big mobile rig. They brought out a big soundboard and camera guys and the whole thing. It was amazing. It was a big undertaking. So, that was really special. So, I gotta be honest, man, in the scheme of all this stuff, again, I have nothing to complain about. Because I had the CD with Sharman, we're kind of riding on it— What I had right before this was a radio interview; it'll be on KBM tomorrow, I think. The CD has been, all things considered, doing well, and people show interest. That's everything to us, man. I just want people to show interest in, enjoy the music, and hopefully I can continue supporting myself doing it. I told Karen this, too— It's like, if there's no venues, I gotta get a job or whatever, that's all part of it too. I'll learn how to make the frickin' coffee, you know. (*Murphy laughs*) I spend enough time here. They got a new look latte machine. I described it, man, when I first saw it— It looks like a frickin' DeLorean or something. So does that cover what you need?

MURPHY 00:56:00: Yeah, this has been great. I'm so happy to hear that, as scary as it is and was in March and into April and— Well, what I what I'm happy about for you is what it sounds the initial fear and uncertainty has resulted, actually, in a quick effort to rely on community and [inaudible]_____ needs to step up, and maybe realize how precarious it was before and how unnecessary that needs to be. And that's great. Really happy to hear that because it could have been— People are still reeling and dealing with very terrible things, but it could have been a lot worse, too.

JOEL 00:57:10: Yeah. Community stepped up, man, and it continues, and it has to evolve further, so everybody feels safe and cared about, outside of the musical realm, too, obviously.

MURPHY 00:57:23: Yeah, and hopefully that can continue. Hopefully, it's a new normal and we don't result—just because things open up we don't result back to—

JOEL 00:57:34: I know, like, two weeks later, it's the same old shit. (*laughs*) No, I don't. It's an eye-opener for me, I'll tell you that.

MURPHY 00:57:45: And you're learning new skills. (*laughs*)

JOEL 00:57:47: I am, man. I got an interface. I got my mic. I got the whole— (*laughs*) That's a positive.

MURPHY 00:57:57: I think that's—always good. Things to take away is what we can learn along the way, right?

JOEL 00:58:08: Are you gonna turn up in the Twin Cities at some point, you think?

MURPHY 00:58:10: I'm hoping to come back this summer. Maybe once or twice depending on the situation.

JOEL 00:58:18: How's your family doing and everything?

MURPHY 00:58:21: They're good. Everyone is healthy.

JOEL 00:58:23: In Green Bay or—?

MURPHY 00:58:24: Yeah, and my sister was in Chicago. She went back up to Green Bay to just help my parents and because she works remotely. Yeah. Everybody's healthy.

JOEL 00:58:35: Good. That's good. And Laura's job is cool?

MURPHY 00:58:38: Yep. She's been working from home for the last three months—the cure which is great. So grateful for that. We got a dog out of it.

JOEL 00:58:49: I know. The dog's cute. I see the pictures.

MURPHY 00:58:52: Yeah, Bird's great, man. Yeah, I'm— We're good.

JOEL 00:59:00: I hope you're getting to play a little bit. I mean, just play some drums/

MURPHY 00:59:03: Yeah, I've got I've got a little setup, right here. So, in that regard, if you want, if you want some drums on anything, and you want to lay down some guitar, I can—we can do some remote recording.

JOEL 00:59:19: Thanks. That would be fun. If you can set up the tech end of it. *(laughs)* I'll be there.

MURPHY 00:59:24: Yeah. I mean, I'm happy to. I'm working on, with some friends I mean—you've met Charlie Brewer, bass player, and a friend of mine in in in LA have been working remotely together creating, which is great. And, hopefully, I can get back into a local scene here once things open up more. I'm a little nervous about that, in that I wasn't really in the scene prior to this. And, so, hopefully people aren't. I mean—I can imagine how people would be— Because we've turned so inward and focused on the community that we have, that people aren't avoiding outsiders or—

JOEL 01:00:13: You'll be welcome, man.

MURPHY 01:00:18: I hope so.

JOEL 01:00:21: Alright, great questions, man. I hope I gave you answers that will help your projects and all that. You edit all you want. I know my answers get long winded.

MURPHY 01:00:35: That's the point. It's really just trying to get people to tell their stories and their thoughts and just raw takes on what the hell is going on. So I really appreciate you taking the time, man.

JOEL 01:00:50: Yeah, absolutely. Alright. We'll keep in touch.

MURPHY 01:00:55: Say hi to everybody at JS for me.

JOEL 01:00:56: Stay healthy, Stay safe, and we'll see you guys soon. Alright, later, Murph.